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SUBJECT: BAS CONGO UPDATE: GOVERNMENT REVOKES BDK CHARTER

REF: KINSHASA 272 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: A/DCM D. Brown, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: The DRC Council of Ministers, meeting in Matadi March 21, approved revocation of the charter of the political-religious group Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) as a social and cultural organization. Earlier, BDK spiritual leader Ne Muanda Nsemi told the press that the group seeks a peaceful resolution to the current conflict with police. Special police forces have now withdrawn from the province. The death toll from recent police-BDK clashes may be significantly higher than the 68 cited in a leaked MONUC report, and could involve serious human rights abuses. MONUC anticipates releasing the results of its current investigation in April. End Summary.

12. (C) The DRC social affairs ministry revoked the charter of the politico-religious group Bunda dia Kongo (BDK) to operate as a social and cultural organization, following a March 21 decision by the Council of Ministers chaired by President Kabila in the Bas-Congo provincial capital Matadi. Minister Godefroid Mayobo of the prime minister's office cited BDK's lack of social activity, such as the construction of schools, as justification for the action. BDK militants and Congolese police forces have clashed during the past three weeks in isolated areas north of Matadi where BDK had mounted an increasingly serious challenge to state authority.

13. (U) BDK spiritual leader and National Assembly Deputy Ne Muanda Nsemi had met two days earlier in Kinshasa with Assembly President Vital Kamerhe following Kamerhe's strong warning during the Assembly's opening session to cease inciting his followers to violence. Ne Muanda Nsemi told the press after the meeting that BDK seeks a peaceful resolution to the conflict as well as long-standing grievances of bas-Congo residents. However, the official communique issued following the March 21 Council meeting included no mention of "dialogue."

14. (C) Acting SRSG Ross Mountain told Kinshasa-based ambassadors March 24 that only regular Congolese National Police (PNC) units remained in the province following the recent withdrawal of 6-700 elements of the Rapid Intervention Police (PIR), notably the Simba Battalion of special police forces loyal to Inspector General John Numbi. MONUC interprets this move as indicating the government believes it has met its objectives. Mountain reported that MONUC currently has 234 peacekeeping troops and two police platoons deployed in the province.

15. (C) MONUC's joint investigative team will remain in

Bas-Congo until April 5. MONUC anticipates releasing their report in April. A MONUC analyst told us March 25 he feared the death toll will be much higher than the 68 cited by the press in a leaked report from MONUC's earlier humanitarian mission, and that government security forces would be blamed for numerous human rights violations.

¶6. (C) Comment: It is impossible to predict at this time the effect of BDK's decertification. Mountain accurately described it as "a wild card," and thought it could drive members underground. The MONUC analyst speculated about possible restrictions on freedom of assembly by BDK members or another attempt to lift Ne Muanda Nsemi's parliamentary immunity. End Comment.

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